



# LEWIS & CLARK CITY-COUNTY Health Department

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## **Algae Bloom Spotted on Holter Lake; Precautions Advised**

The Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) has notified local health officials of a report of an algae bloom on Holter Lake.

Algae blooms are common in any standing water that's exposed to the sun. Some but not all algae blooms can be toxic and cause illness or even death in warm-blooded animals, including people, waterfowl, livestock, and pets.

"People should avoid water that looks like pea soup, grass clippings, or green latex paint," said Laurel Riek, environmental health specialist with the Lewis and Clark City-County Health Department. "We don't often see toxic effects from these blooms, but they can and do occur."

She noted that algae blooms are a normal summer occurrence in lakes, reservoirs, stock ponds, and roadside ditches and are caused by hot weather.

An algae bloom is a rapid and massive buildup of algae cells that imparts a green color to the water. The algae usually are suspended in a water column or clump together into floating mats. They don't grow from the bottom as do mosses or "water weeds."

Sometimes wind and wave action may concentrate the algae along the shore. It's not usually found in rivers, streams, springs, irrigation canals, or wells.

"There's no way to tell for sure if a particular algae bloom is toxic," Riek said. "Harmless strains of potential toxin-producing algae look the same as deadly strains under a microscope."

Fish taken from waters infested with toxic algae are not likely to cause secondary poisoning if eaten in moderation, although they may taste "weedy," Riek said. Nonetheless, she advised anglers to avoid fish taken from such waters, particularly if they appear sickly or sluggish.

Boiling and conventional water disinfection measures are not effective in removing or deactivating blue-green algae toxins. Water that is free of blue-green algae may not be free of the toxin.

There are two basic kinds of algae toxins. A milder type is rarely fatal but may produce diarrhea, nausea, cramps, general lethargy, liver damage, and general long-term debility. The more potent type is usually fatal within a short time. It may cause staggering, muscle spasms, labored

breathing, and convulsions. People experience sensations of numbness, dizziness, tingling, and fainting. There is no known antidote effective against the toxin once it has been ingested.

Anyone who believes they may have been exposed to toxic blue-green algae should see a health-care provider.

For more information about toxic algae, visit the DEQ website at <http://deq.mt.gov/toxicalgaefactsheet.mcpx>

*The mission of the Lewis and Clark City-County Health Department is to improve and protect the health of all county residents.*